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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PRAGUE 000501

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EUR/NCE FOR FICHTE, EUR/PRA FOR FRIEDT AND AZEVEDO, OSD FOR IARROBINO AND SADOWSKA, USNATO FOR SHEEHAN AND MALONEY, MDA FOR LEHNER AND JENKINS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV MASS MARR EZ

SUBJECT: MISSILE DEFENSE: GENERAL OBERING HAS SUCCESSFUL MEETINGS IN PRAGUE

Classified By: Political-Economic Counselor Mike Dodman  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary. Lt. General Henry Obering, Director of the Missile Defense Agency, held meetings with a broad range of leaders in Prague on April 22-23 to discuss the U.S. proposal to place a missile defense radar in the Czech Republic. Participants described the meetings as extremely useful, and press reporting and commentary were generally positive. During the visit, senior representatives of the Czech Government indicated their intention to pursue the idea of joining the group of missile defense "framework nations." The Czechs are also interested in following up on this visit, and the very successful parliamentary trip to the Marshall Islands, with additional briefings for the press and additional travel to U.S. facilities. End summary.

¶12. (U) During his visit on April 22-23, Lt. General Obering met with Czech President Vaclav Klaus, Prime Minister Mirek Topolanek, Deputy PM Alexandr (Sasha) Vondra, Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, Defense Minister Vlasta Parkanova, Opposition leader Jiri Paroubek (CSSD), and other key members of the MFA, MOD, and the Parliament (supporters and opponents of the missile defense proposal alike). Obering also had interviews with the local press that generated considerable coverage on the issue.

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Meeting with President Klaus  
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¶13. (C) General Obering met with Czech President Vaclav Klaus, who was preparing for a state visit to Russia on April 27. Obering described the April 19 NRC meeting in Brussels, and said the U.S. delegation went to great length to refute Russian claims that MD sites in Central Europe are directed against Russia. In response, Klaus said his long-planned visit to Moscow, which initially focused on economic ties, would now have a strong MD component. Klaus said his goal was to ensure that Russian concerns over MD do not harm otherwise positive Czech-Russian relations. (Note: Klaus generated widespread press on April 26 for his comment that he would explain to Russia during his official visit that missile defense in Central Europe is not aimed at Russia. End note)

¶14. (C) Notably, Klaus did not offer a strong statement of support on MD. Instead, he repeated his previous assessment

that MD is a complicated issue, and that it is important for the Czech Republic to thoroughly debate the issue before a final decision is made. In response to Obering's description of the perceived threat from Iran, Klaus said he believes the West should engage with Iran, in addition to providing a strong deterrent.

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Presentation to the National Security Council  
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15. (C) General Obering offered his presentation and simulations to the full National Security Council, consisting of the Prime Minister and senior cabinet members concerned with national security, as well as the speakers of the two chambers of parliament. The briefing was well received, with Prime Minister Topolanek terming it "brilliant."

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Presentation to Senior MOD and MFA Representatives  
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16. (C) General Obering gave an in-depth presentation on missile defense and the radar to a gathering of MFA and MOD experts and leaders working on missile defense. Attendees at the meeting included Deputy Foreign Minister Tomas Pojar, Deputy Defense Minister Martin Bartak, and Chief of General Staff Vlasimil Picek. Pojar focused on the degree of overlap between U.S. and Czech environmental laws, an issue which General Obering said was under investigation. Defense Policy Director Dvorak asked about Russia's perception that missile defense could be expanded to host more interceptors in the future, and also about the appropriate level of air defense for the facility. Obering said the United States has no plans

PRAGUE 00000501 002 OF 004

to expand the planned number of interceptors, and that the United States currently saw no need for defenses such as the Patriot PAC-3's that Polish officials have said they might request.

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Lunch hosted by Deputy PM Alexandr Vondra  
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17. (C) Over lunch, Deputy PM Alexandr (Sasha) Vondra said he was focused on three things to make the missile defense proposal a success: 1) information sharing, 2) communication of that information, and 3) preparation for negotiations. Vondra believes there is plenty of time to favorably change Czech public opinion on MD, and hopes the negotiation process could be portrayed as beneficial for both sides.

18. (C) Referring to the Green Party, Vondra described himself as a "hawk who must communicate with doves" within the coalition government to promote missile defense.

19. (C) On the topic of the Russian opposition to MD, Vondra estimated that Russian interference had been largely counterproductive in terms of Czech public opinion. He explained that the average Czech, while not happy about increased tensions, takes a dim view of Russian proclamations about the Czech Republic. Vondra added that Czech President Klaus could play a helpful role during his April 26 visit to Moscow. Vondra observed that, though the allies must still brief Russia on technical information, the real nature of Russian opposition is not technical. Further on the subject of Russia, Deputy FM Pojar said German Chancellor Angela Merkel is fed up with Russian enthusiasm for causing disturbances in German politics, and thought she would not be outspoken for domestic reasons.

110. (C) General Obering and DFM Pojar discussed the possibility of the Czech Republic signing a Framework Memorandum of Understanding on Missile Defense Cooperation, similar to the ones previously signed by the United Kingdom,

Denmark, Japan, and Italy. General Obering described the April 19 NAC and NATO-Russia Council meetings in Brussels as extremely productive, and said that we stand at a critical moment to achieve security not just for the U.S. and the Czech Republic, but also for allies and friends.

¶11. (C) Vondra expressed his hope that Czech companies would be selected to provide technology for missile defense. He spoke of the need for a example of defense contracting to demonstrate the economic benefits of close ties with the United States. He thought Czech software companies had been involved in Defense Department tenders in the past. Vondra thought such a contract need not be a big budget deal. He suggested the United States send a trade delegation to the Pribram and Plzen area, to promote economic cooperation.

¶12. (U) CSSD parliamentarian Miroslav Svoboda attended the lunch and shared his belief that, based on his visit to Kwajalein, the Czech Republic has nothing to fear from hosting the radar.

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Presentation to Parliament  
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¶13. (C) General Obering's detailed presentation to members of the Parliamentary and Senate committees on Foreign Affairs and Defense was greeted with predictably mixed results. Minister of Defense Vlasta Parkanova and ODC Parliamentary Committee Chairman Jan Vidim praised the depth of information-sharing. Members of the left end of the CSSD party and the Communist party were cynical, asking questions in the form of statements. Many did not bother to listen to the answers.

¶14. (C) Parliamentary questions focused on Russia, the effectiveness of the MD system, U.S. Congressional levels of support for funding the European site, and degrees of collaboration with NATO. Overall the presentation and Q&A session won high marks for transparency and for countering Russian assertions. Nevertheless, it failed to convince the deputies who oppose missile defense for ideological reasons.

PRAGUE 00000501 003 OF 004

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Meeting with Opposition Leader Jiri Paroubek  
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¶15. (C) General Obering had a cordial and productive meeting with Social Democratic Party (CSSD) Chairman Jiri Paroubek (who was accompanied by his Foreign Policy Advisor, Ivan Busniak). Paroubek spoke at length about the close relations between his party and the United States, and CSSD's support for transatlantic relations. He said the MD radar is the only area of difference between CSSD and the USG, but repeated his earlier pledges that the party's stance on MD would remain "flexible" and open to debate. With the recent return of several CSSD MPs from their trip to the Marshall Islands, combined with the positive developments at NATO, Paroubek announced that a "second phase" of the party's internal debate on MD would now begin. Obering offered USG assistance to support the debate, and invited Paroubek to visit the United States to see MDA facilities. (Note: Paroubek did not respond to this invitation, which Ambassador had previously made. Paroubek has told us he would be interested in a visit to the U.S. in the fall, but would likely not have time to visit the Marshall Islands. End note.)

¶16. (C) General Obering showed Paroubek a computerized simulation that demonstrates the improved coverage for Europe that a radar in the Czech Republic (and interceptors in Poland) would provide in the event of a long-range missile launch from Iran. Paroubek said he appreciated the simulation, as well as Obering's detailed explanations about the Iranian threat, future integration with NATO, and the health aspects of the radar. Paroubek said he wanted to

distribute the minutes of the meeting to CSSD members, and later asked Emboffs for copies of certain MDA slides to provide to CSSD members on the party's intranet.

¶117. (C) Further describing CSSD views on MD, Paroubek went to great length to distinguish CSSD's approach to foreign policy from that of the current government. He described ODS's approach as simplistic, focused solely on transatlantic relations and ignorant of the importance of maintaining good relations with European neighbors, including the EU. He accused the government of failing to conduct an adequate public debate about MD, both in the Parliament and the Brdy region. He said the government often resorted to "sentimental arguments" (e.g., "the Americans liberated the country in 1945, therefore we need to support MD"), rather than relying on a fact-based approach.

¶118. (C) Paroubek restated the CSSD demand for a clear linkage to NATO and a referendum. However, he did not dwell on these points, and instead focused on how the GOCR could do a better job selling the system to the Czechs. (He noted that 80 per cent of his party is opposed to MD.) He thought it is important for the GOCR and the USG to work with Czech scientific experts to educate them on the radar, so they can explain the system and answer technical questions. Finally, Paroubek explained the political dilemma he faces in dealing with the Communist party. As CSSD Chairman, he said he made the decision to pursue a more "sophisticated and flexible" policy with the Communists (KSCM), in contrast to his predecessors. He said KSCM today is the weakest it has ever been, and attributed that weakness to the CSSD policy on, *inter alia*, the MD radar. He said CSSD could not be more forward leaning on MD, as this would be a "gift" to KSCM. Paroubek plans to pursue his "sophisticated" policy until KSCM preferences fell to 8%, which he termed the number of "Stalinists" who would never vote for CSSD or anyone else.

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Dinner with Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg  
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¶119. (C) FM Schwarzenberg gathered a range of influential opinion makers for the final event the visit, a dinner at the MFA. Attendees included Czechs dedicated to bringing a missile defense radar to the Czech Republic, and skeptics such as Green Party Foreign Policy Spokesman Ondrej Liska, and CSSD Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee chair Jan Hamacek. The dinner provided an opportunity for frank

PRAGUE 00000501 004 OF 004

discussion between individuals that do not have daily contact on the issue because they are not natural allies, and therefore encouraged mutual transparency and exchange of information.

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Breakfast with Think Tanks  
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¶120. (C) MOD Director of Defense Policy and Strategy Ivan Dvorak hosted a breakfast discussion on missile defense with members of think tanks, and political advisors influential on defense issues. Discussion focused on Russia, NATO, the nature of the missile threats, environmental and health concerns, and missile defense as a deterrent. The invited guests were happy to have had the opportunity to discuss the issues surrounding the proposed deployment with General Obering. There was a request from this group to view the MD briefing given at NATO on April 19. General Obering said the U.S. would be happy to provide a briefer at some stage in the future, and Dvorak agreed to organize a follow-up meeting to host the event.

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Television, Radio and Print Interviews  
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**¶21.** (U) General Obering's visit was covered widely by the Czech media and reached the broadest Czech audience possible. In total, Obering's statements reached about 1.5 million readers and 4 million viewers. The statements most reported in the press concerned: (1) when the Czech government is likely to make a decision and what will happen if the response is negative, (2) the threats the MD system is designed to protect against, (3) how the system fits into the NATO defense strategy, and (4) Russia's opposition to the system. In addition to in-depth coverage by the three leading Czech daily newspapers (MF Dnes, Pravo, and Lidovy Noviny), General Obering's 20-minute interviews for Czech Radio and Czech Television were broadcast in their entirety. Czech TV also rebroadcast the main features of the interview in its prime news program. Czech journalists covered the opening of the meeting Obering had with parliamentarians, but were not able to stay to see the actual briefing Obering presented; several journalists and GOCR officials have since told us that it is important to make the briefing available to the public, in order to maintain the spirit of transparency that both governments have been promoting in this debate.

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Comment and next steps  
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**¶22.** (C) General Obering's visit gave a major boost to the U.S.-Czech effort to explain the U.S. missile defense system and the rationale for the Czech radar to a broad range of decision makers and the Czech public. Our task now is to capitalize on the progress made during this visit, as well as that generated by the parliamentary trip to the Marshall Islands April 16-20. Immediate next steps include:

- responding to the Czech desire for information about a Framework Agreement on MD cooperation (this would be separate from the two agreements we will start negotiating with the Czechs in May, but may also reduce pressure from the Czechs to make "cooperation" an element of these negotiations).
- providing the Czechs with a copy of General Obering's briefing that can be used with the press, to include a version of the simulations.
- bringing USG technical experts to Prague for follow-on meetings with Czech government experts, Czech scientists, and local officials; as a first step, the Czechs are preparing a list of questions that they hope can be answered during a DVC between USG and Czech government technical experts.
- planning for the next trip of Czechs (to include journalists) to U.S. MD facilities.

**¶23.** (U) This cable has been cleared by MDA and OSD.  
GRABER